Brian Smith
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Montana Brewery Oral History Project
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Anneliese Warhank: Today is March 21st, 2016. We're at the State Library in Helena, MT. This is Anneliese Warhank, the oral historian at the Montana Historical Society and I am speaking with Brian Smith, owner of Blackfoot River Brewing Company.

Brian Smith: That's me!

AW: That's you! Alright let's start out with general topics. Tell me about your childhood, such as where you were born and what sort of hobbies you had growing up.

BS: I was born in Florida, actually right outside Orlando. The youngest of five boys. Hobbies…we actually lived in a rural area we pretty much ran amok as kids. Something you can't really do today. We would hike for miles, ride our bikes, you know. Super fun things that we had freedoms then that kids today just don't get to do. So all we had all kinds of hobbies in terms of swimming and fishing. Pretty nice childhood, I guess.

AW: Great, any interest as a child of beer and brewing? I mean back then domestics kind of ruled.

BS: Domestics did really kind of rule and I didn't really have any kind of interest in beer although I have a fairly humorous beer story from when I was very young. My father worked quite a bit but quitting time he was home. We had one phone in the kind of kitchen area of the house. He was laying on the couch smoking a cigar and drinking a can of Old Milwaukee. The phone rang and he went into the kitchen to answer the phone. Literally my four brothers and I in chronological order one at a time we ran into the living room, we took a sip out of his beer and took a puff off his cigar and ran back down the hall giggling. But no I did actually didn't like beer that much until I got older so I didn't have any childhood desire to be a brewer. I would say it was my teenage years when I started to enjoy beer.

AW: So college, where did you attend college and what did you study?

BS: A bunch of places. I started at the University of Florida in Gainesville. I was there for about a year and a half, was an animal science and pre-vet major. And I decided after a while…well, I lost my older brother and kind of decided it was time to be serious about life. University of Florida was a big party school, still is I'm sure. Anyways I decided to leave college and join the military and that would kind of straighten me out a little bit. Certainly helped me grow up very

quickly. So I had several other opportunities after that, I continued to go to college at University of Maryland and then back at the University of Central Florida and then finally I went to graduate school here in Missoula.

AW: Studying?

BS: Economics.

AW: Okay and just to quickly backtrack, as far as your military. What branch were you in and where were you stationed?

BS: I was in the air force and I was stationed essentially in three different places in the almost five years I was in. I first started off in Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, TX. That's where they do basic training. But I enlisted to be a linguist, an intelligence analyst and a linguist. You don't get to pick your language in the Air Force, the Air Force gets to pick it for you. And being during the Cold War, they of course chose Russian for me. And so at the one time in history, unfortunately for my lifestyle, the Russian language program had been moved. It's the Defense Language Institute which teaches military students of other foreign languages and it's based at the Presidio of Monterey in California. Which is a very desirable place to be stationed as opposed to the outskirts of San Antonio, TX. But there was a five year window where all the Russian students when to San Antonio so I ended up spending about fourteen months there studying Russian eight hours a day in a very small class room about this big [motions to room] with native Russian teachers. After the conclusion of that part of the langue I then went to Goodfellow Air Force Base which is in San Angelo, TX, even further out in the middle of nowhere. It's basically the base where the United States sends all of its military communications intelligence students to. So it's a top secret facility where you learned all the things that they couldn't teach you because we had native Russian teachers for the languages. So that's where you go to learn all the military intelligence side of your education. So I spent I think about eight months there and then I was stationed in Wiesbaden, West Germany for a little over three years after that. Was a little unique there, I was technically part of the Air Force but for that entire time was part of a very small Air Force detachment that was loaned to the Army. I actually wore Army uniforms and worked on an Army base. Yeah a little different.

AW: Did you consume any German beverages while you were over there or was that pretty military focused during that time?

BS: Oh no. And this actually becomes a big tie in to your earlier question. I really became interested in, we'll call it craft beer today or good beer, when I was in the military. In fact in the first year or so in San Antonio they had a Class 6 store which is a military liquor store. And we didn't get a lot of freedom but on the weekend we got to do pretty much whatever we wanted and a friend of mine in training and I, in West Texas it's a pretty boring spot so on most Friday nights we would got to the Class 6 store. And this is pretty amazing and this is all because of military influence in the Class 6 store had probably about sixty different kinds of beer from all

over the world. And you would never find that in Texas anywhere else but that's because military members had been all over the world and people fell in love with beers. So they had all these great beers and every Friday night we would go and we would usually pick out three six-packs of beers and go to his house, he was married, we'd go to his house and drink beer and listen to music and cook dinner and hang out with his wife and kids. So we got to really work our way through beer styles you would just never see. I mean we had like Cooper and Sons Bottle Conditioned Ale from Australia which is naturally re-fermented in the bottle. You could get Belhaven Scottish Ale, and San Miguel. All kind of things we never had access to. So that was really one of the first things that opened my eyes to better beer than just the industrial beer. And then the three years in Germany, of course, getting there, you know beer is such an integrated part of German culture it had wakened me up pretty quick.

AW: That's great. Okay back to schooling. Why Montana? It seems like you had been everywhere then all of a sudden you're in Montana.

BS: Because I met and fell in love with and married a girl from Missoula who was a Russian language student in the army so after, she actually left the army when our son was born and we were still living in Germany, but when my enlistment was up I was ready to come back to our country. So we moved back and I had just actually finished my degree going all the time while I was there to the extent possible until we came back to Missoula where I started graduate school and she went on to finish her degree. So that's how I got to Missoula. Her father was a professor there at the university for many years.

AW: In what department?

BS: Forestry.

AW: Forestry. Alright so what was the beer drinking culture in Missoula when you first arrived there?

BS: You know I was not a very-I was going to school initially on the Veteran's Educational Assistance Program called VEAP, which was probably the chinsyest V.A. educational benefit ever. Before, they had the old G.I. bill which was very generous. It was at a time when the economy was pretty bad in the U.S. and they didn't need a lot of incentives for people to join the military. So I didn't really get much assistance. Basically I got $300 a month from the V.A., but I had to save almost half of that originally so it really like a match. It didn't really help out a whole lot in terms of money so my beer drinking opportunities initially in Missoula, especially trying to raise a two-year old, was pretty difficult. So I drank cheap beer.

AW: What year was this about?

BS: Would have been 1988?

AW: But you remember the breweries in town?

BS: in 1988 I believe just one brewery had opened, I believe in 1987 Bayern Brewery opened. And I did make it there a few times. Really appreciated his beer because I felt like he did a great job making traditional German beer having just lived in Germany. And Gordon's Market had a fairly decent selection of imported and craft beer. They're still there today. But I believe that was the only brewery in Missoula and I want to say in the state at the time there was a brewery in Miles City that may have been open called Miles Town Brewing Company. Of course Kessler, the second generation had just recently opened just a couple of years before.

AW: Do you happen to remember if there were many other people that were focused on microbrews or were there still a lot of people just drinking domestics?

BS: There were a lot of people I think still drinking domestics, especially in a college town. Obviously affordability was a concern. But clearly also there were people who probably had better availability of imported beers and some of the early craft beers becoming available than had been before. They were certainly available. This was also a key thing in my life, I guess being there. That was really the first time because buying beer at Gordon's Market, realizing they also sold home beer making supplies at Gordon's. I had never really thought of it before or realized you could make traditional styles of quality, craft beer at home. So that was the first point of where I became aware that was an option. That came into play a little bit later.

AW: Do you remember how breweries were distribution their beer? Was it mainly on-site or did you see their taps at local bars?

BS: At that point when I was in Missoula, I don't think that Bayern distributed outside their closely held tavern. Jurgen Knoller was the brewer for Bayern and his wife, Helena. I want to say girl, she isn't a girl she's my age, Tammy Urstich, her and her father owned the bar in Missoula, they called it the Iron Horse Pub. At that time when I lived in Missoula he was just brewing for sales on-site and there was no bottling yet or anything. He was the only brewery in Missoula at that time, I recall. I know just a couple of years later when moving to Helena and becoming much more familiar with Kessler, I used to go to the Kessler Brewery a lot and they would sell "short fills" for about $13 a case, maybe $12 a case. They were bottles that weren't filled all the way up. So I got to know some of the folks there. And at that time, it was a pretty novel thing, it was legal, they were doing their own distribution, self-distributing to bars and restaurants, and their bottled products to grocery stores, convenience stores. Self-distribution wasn't something a lot of people did early on. There were a few beers that you would see out there that were from Montana, but it weren't that many being made until I guess a few years later after that.

AW: Alright, so you mentioned that you came across the home brewing kits. So that answers the question how you got involved in beer brewing. Do you know if any other people in the community…was there a home brewing interest growing at the time you got into it?

BS: Yes, I really didn't start practicing it until I moved to Helena to intern for the state in the summer of '89 and went back for my second year of graduate school and came back permanently

in June of 1990 to Helena. I actually worked in politics for a while. It wasn't until the end of that year that I took a job as an economist at the Department of Revenue. One of the guys I worked with, a statistician, we both liked beer and that was where we decide that we don't really want to drink cheap beer anymore, maybe we should try making our own beer. We literally ordered a kit online, or not online in a catalog since online didn't exist then, and started making beer at his house every Thursday I think was our brew day for many years. We actually became very fanatical, rabid kind of home brewers. And really it took off as a great hobby. There were quite a few other people at that time in Helena, I think, and in Missoula as well. People realized that you could make your own beer. Supplies were becoming more readily available. So you also had the formation of home brewing clubs. It was much more prevalent I think more so than it is now. I think to some degree a little bit of the rise of local craft beer in this country has probably reduced that number of home brewers. There were a number of people who did it because it was their best supply of beer and now there is wonderful beer all over the place. There was-you know we were very much involved in local home brewing club, but they still exist out there.

AW: Okay so from home brewing you go to Howling Wolf. And you were already in Helena so of course you open the store here. What was the catalyst to get that store open?

BS: Well Brad and I, this was my co-worker and founding partner in the brewery with me, we liked joked but it wasn't really entirely joking, we thought if we started selling beer-we both still worked for the state-if we started selling home beer making supplies we would just be able to buy all our supplies at wholesale and we'd be able to get more and more supplies and make bigger and bigger batches of beer. That's sort of what we did initially. It was kind of an honestly a progression for us in a lot of ways was home brewing as a hobby we just continued to brew more beer, more different kinds of beer, and buy bigger equipment. A very slow progression but just kept letting it grow. So that was sort of our initial, you know, half of a joke, so we would save money on our own purchases but also it was just part of being a part of being in that community, there was no local retailer of home beer making and wine making supplies. In those days also the Internet wasn't what it is today, in fact it was just barely starting. So the logistics of mail ordering stuff then was difficult so it was part of that community to be able to have a store in town people could get supplied.

AW: What year did that open?

BS: 1995

AW: Where was the location?

BS: We originally rented some space, Helena had a gourmet market in those days called the Gourmet Grocer. It was on the corner of Cruise and 11th at Malfunction Junction, what is today The Man Store. It was called The Gourmet Grocer and they had kind of a back little room there that we made a rental agreement where we rented the shelf space and they collected money for most of the purchase there. We owned the inventory and stock and put it up and they obviously

had the staff and facility. It ran like that for a year and then we had enough demand that we moved and got our own full-service shop at 13 Placer, right around the corner form Murray's, if you know where Murray's is.

AW: Okay let's get to the Legislative years. So obviously HB 442 was the one that finally allowed for the on-site sale and all of that, but as you have mentioned previously it sounds like the Tavern Association and the brewing industry had kind of been at odds for a number of sessions leading up to the '99 session. So it looks like in 1995 HB 554 was put forth and that did include on-site sale. Do you remember anything about those hearings?

BS: Yes, a little bit. So it was sponsored by Rep. Hal Harper here in Helena, a great person, speaker of the house at lease for a couple of sessions. He's a friend of mine. He was a big supporter of local business. At that point there still weren't a lot of breweries in the state. I think in 1995 was the year Big Sky started. Kessler was operating, but struggling. He was aware that basically it was us and Mississippi; everywhere else in this country you could retail beer directly on your premise. It really is key to being successful because you have to have some way when you're really small to generate cash because also the distribution end of the wholesale beer market can be very difficult to gain access to, particularly back then. So he recognized it was a very important thing for breweries to be able to grow, we needed to change the regulatory environment and was willing to take that on. It wasn't a particularly popular stance with the tavern owners. It was also at a point of a lot of change in the tavern business. In the late 80's the Supreme Court had legalized gambling in this state and I think it was the '89 special session of the legislature where the legislature had to come in and regulate it. It could have been the '87 session, I think it was '89. So they basically came up with the idea that anybody who has a beer and wine or a malt beverage license, we'll give you a gambling license as part of that package. Of course those licenses happened to be on a quota system dating back to 1947, so tying the gambling into the alcohol started to just do absolutely crazy things to the value of those licenses. That's where the rub really comes in, you know a brewery taproom was never going to put the bars out of business, but they were protecting their economic value and their gambling license but their licenses were getting so expensive and they wanted to keep anybody basically out of the business itself. That's where the maybe not so great relations came along. The alcohol industry is very heavily regulated and because of the 21st amendment every state gets to regulate differently. There are certainly places where it has been regulated to benefit some parts of the industry. Particularly in this state at that point with the quota system you had to have a quota license to sell. Some of those folks were still mad even, prior to 1972 the only place you could buy beer or wine in this state was in a bar. And I it was in '72 or '76 the legislature allowed off-premise beer and wine sales in grocery stores and convenience stores and the bars were still really mad about that. So I think they saw some of this popularity growing for local breweries and then the desire for some breweries to have some retail ability because you really needed it and they didn't want to cooperate.

AW: Do you know if there were a lot of breweries that were distributing in bars at that time?

BS: In the 1995 session, that first one? No I don't think so. I think that was the year Big Sky started. There were some people out there thinking about starting. There was a brewer up in Whitefish called Whitefish Brewing Company. Gary Hutchison was his name, he was producing beer. Miles Town was producing beer. There was a brewer in Belgrade, probably one of the earliest female brewers in the country. You'll see her name on the witness list Jennifer Ballard, The Rocking R Brewing Company, which maybe later turned into Bridger. But there weren't that many around. There was a couple that were operating in the brewpub kind of sense. You see why they testify against the bill was the owners of both Spanish Peaks and the owners of Montana Brewing Company in Billings. Those had both started. They were both tavern owners who had had family members that operated breweries for their benefit, which is sort of the quasi-legal way of to get around. And so they, I think, had an interest in not changing the system either. But they didn't really distribute. Montana Brewing Company still exists and still doesn't distribute outside its own restaurant. And Spanish Peaks then later became very popular microbeer in Montana, but not many people knew they weren't making the beer actually in Bozeman. They had a little, small brewery there and they made beer to serve on premise, but they were having a contract brewed in Minnesota and bottled. So Black Dog Ale was very, very popular, I don't know if you remember seeing it around or not but and it was probably maybe one of the first big in Montana craft beer that got a lot of traction in the packaged market-bottles in the grocery stores and convince stores so very successful brand for at least a while anyway.

AW: But as far as taverns making sort of money off most of the Montana breweries, since they weren't selling it they...

BS: They carried very little beer; you know a very few establishments got it at that time. I'd say here in Helena, what used to be Miller's Cave was kind of an early adopter of having Montana craft beer. Bert & Ernie's was as well, the Winbag to some degree, mostly downtown. You know, people willing to take some of the other Montana made beers on. But definitely not very many establishments.

AW: And then the '97 legislations came about and that also included homebrewing, so homebrewing in the state was actually illegal until '97?

BS: Yes, it mostly was. Let's back up, actually the '95 bill included that as well. It was something that Brad and I had brought to Hal when he started to come out with his brewpub bill. Brad and I both worked for the Department of Revenue, the Director's Office. We were both legislative tax policy analysts and rabid homebrewers. Working for the department, we basically did all the research analysis on any legislative proposal that would affect the department. Which is still the case now, Department of Revenue regulates the liquor statutes, Title 16. And the way Title 16 reads in this state, basically it says we're a control state when it comes to alcohol. It says it's not specifically allowed in the statute, regarding the alcoholic beverages, you can't do it. You have to have basically express permission under the code to do a particular thing and then when you read the section about producing alcohol, there was no provision to allow the personal production of

beer in the state. Therefore by definition in code it was not legal. It had never been enforced; however someone did actually file an anonymous complaint against Brad and I for producing large amounts of beer at home. Anyway that was something that we suggested, that it included in that bill and Hal did include it because it needed to be done. But it's important to realize that even at the federal level, upon the appeal of prohibition our federal government did not legalize- homebrewing got overlooked. So when they appealed prohibition home wine making became legal again. Distilling did not, but home brewing just got ignored, it just didn't get included. It wasn't until 1978 that the federal government passed a law to legalize. They didn't call it homebrewing they called it, I think, the production of beer for personal use. And that's a huge thing because quite frankly that's what really spurred the microbeer revolution in this country was the fact that when the federal government lifted the prohibition on homebrewing it was that when people that started making their own beer who were looking around at the tasteless, industrial product that beer had become in this country and said, "we can do better". So it was a huge, huge thing and that just had never happened here in Montana, they had never taken a step to legalize homebrewing either, even though wine had already been taken care of as well. So that part of the bill was added basically to just incorporate the federal allowances for making beer for personal use. But as you saw at the hearing in '95 and the number of opponents, they just killed the whole bill.

AW: It didn't even make it out of the committee, correct?

BS: No, and they called it the "red herring" and thought the bill was really to legalize free beer bars and everything else. So it stayed again in 1997.

AW: Was the bill written the same way, or did they change anything up?

BS: Now you're really going to stretch my memory. I think there were some changes. If I believe correctly, basically they were the same bills but I think Hal had taken the hours down a little earlier. I think the first one they had gone to 11 p.m., I think they maybe had taken that down to be a little less appearance to be competing with taverns. And I don't remember if it was specified in '95, but it was very clear in the '97 bill that a brewery license would not involve gambling, which was of course becoming a big issue. So there were some changes. Unfortunately you look today at how detailed our legislative records are, you would be able to tell, but you look back then and there is large parts of the '99 testimony that are still missing. But I wouldn't say there was any huge changes but I think there was a tightening of the hours mobility.

AW: And of course, everything except the homebrewing portion of the bill got cut out and homebrewing was legalized in '97.

BS: Correct.

AW: And you testified at both the '95 and '97, in favor of the bills

BS: Yes, I don't find my name, of course what's in there in the '97 record isn't particularly complete either. And I didn't say nearly as much, I actually made quite a bigger presentation at the '95 hearing. But part of the reason, if we can allow real life to enter, was that we had an organization meeting the night before at Kessler Brewing and I probably had a little too much to drink and this was an 8 o'clock hearing at House Business & Labor and I'm still a little hungover and so I did one of these I get up and basically, "Me too, Brian Smith, Helena" go back and sit down before I fell over or something. So yes, I did testify at both of those.

AW: Okay, and then the 1999 session came about. It sounds like prior to that, the brewers had actually worked with the tavern association to come to some sort of agreement? Because I mean because there is no real opposition to the '99-it just went straight through.

BS: Yup, so there had been some dialogue started, because of some political changes and the legislature decided it was best to have someone else probably carry the bill and Jay Stovel from Billings very graciously did it, but only after-basically we worked out the terms ahead of time. There was a number of people involved in that. At this time Kessler had some new owners. So Todd Daniels and Mike James, myself, you'll see Dennis Himmelberger's name in there from Himmelberger Brewing and Tim O'Leary who at the time was maybe just starting his brewery at the same time we were. If you saw him he had originally testified on the homebrewing side of stuff too. The Kettlehouse originally opened in Missoula not as a brewery, but as kind of a beer laundromat where you would go and use all their equipment and make your beer there. So he testified-well-we had all gotten together and talked with primarily the representatives on the other industry side who were Mark Staples from the Tavern Association their lobbyist, and Tom Hopgood the lobbyist from the-they were then called the Montana Beer and Wine Wholesalers, I believe. And so we worked those things out. And there was some-why did we have more success? There were some things changing. There was obviously more and more breweries becoming more popular. At that point, I want to say, I think there were 10 in the state. At that point we were just opening, I think Kettlehouse was just opening, I think Harvest Moon was just opening and what is today Red Lodge was just opening. So there was definitely more people. And somebody had come up with the idea earlier that said if we don't figure out some kind of way for people to be allowed to sell beer retail, then brewers would start charging for tours. See under the old statute we were allowed-we had no limit on the amount of beer we served somebody. You could come in the brewery and 8 a.m. to 2 a.m. we could-you could drink as much beer as you wanted, we just couldn't charge for it. So somebody had decided that well if we just start charging for a tour, and at the end of every tour you just let the participants have all the beer they want, it would be a way to start capturing some revenue in your taproom. It wasn't prohibited anywhere, sort of a loophole I guess if you want to look at it or some gray area in the law. Even though at the that point it was decide to allow some limited sale on consumption and have some regulations around it. A number of people kind of work that out. In fact they didn't really even finish working out all of the details even a few days just before the hearing. There

were some times, some of the opening times in there got changed and stuff right before the hearings.

AW: Interesting, well actually I've spoken briefly with Kristi Blazer so I hope to interview her next and get that side.

BS: And she just started right then with representing the Wholesalers. Tom Hopgood had been their counsel for many years and he was getting ready to move to, like North Dakota. And I think they were in the same firm. That '99 session they worked together I think you'll see both of them testify on that bill during the '99 session. I think she had just started to represent them in that session.

AW: Perfect. So in 1999 the bill passed. It seemed like right before that you guys had opened your brewery. So what made you make the leap from homebrewing to the actual brewery?

BS: Um craziness [laughs]. It wasn't a very favorable environment without the ability to sell beer on premise. I mean Brad and I-and by this point we had picked up actually a third partner in the beginning of 1998. That was when we really started to put together the plan for the brewery to try and raise the money and all those things. And we were extremely passionate about beer, it was something we really wanted to do. None of us ever had an idea that we were going to get really big, get really rich, but we really liked to make beer. Both of use had been working in the Department of Revenue, we had a really interesting jobs but it used to get really frustrating that we would spend enormous amounts of efforts on very detailed analysis on particular tax bills and things. I mean you really work hard to do some really good work and when you send this analysis proposal across the street to the legislature someone might take your 25 page report and throw it in the garbage can because it, you know didn't match somebody's platform or it wasn't going to be politically salable this time. So sometimes you ended up feeling like you never accomplished much. And this was one of the things I really like about making beer. And I'm not a very artistic person, I've never been able to paint or sing or any of those things or play the music, but I could always make, well when I started I could make really good beer. So it was an artistic expression for me and it was something I really got a sense of accomplishment from when I made what I felt was a really nice beer and when I shared it with somebody and they really liked it, it made me really happy. That was probably honestly the sort of spreading the love of beer was really why we went there. But of course we had to financially justify it in order to borrow money. At that time it was very difficult because there were breweries dropping left and right around the country. There was a big dip. But trying to convince the bank was difficult but there was a lot of really affordable equipment available on the market. But in that absence why did we really choose to start? We looked at the other beers that were currently out there being made and we knew that could make a product that people would like. We thought we could make enough money to make it work. So we went for it. At that point we were the third brewery in Helena. Sleeping Giant had opened, they also I believe opened in '95 or '96.

AW: That sounds about right, I was just a child, but that sounds about right. Sorry to jump around on you, just jumping back to the '99 session. With the way the bill finally came out that passed, did you have concerns or were you pretty satisfied with the language?

BS: For me personally, I was fairly satisfied with the compromise. I mean nobody liked the 8 o'clock. 8 o'clock is pretty early to shut down. None of us really cared about the pint limit. You know if you give somebody 48 ounces of fairly strong craft beer, that's a really-I still say it today we don't need to sell anybody more than 48 ounces a day. That didn't really bother us, so the hours were the harder thing and we felt like it was early. We actually did have an agreement with this group that bill for that to be 10 o'clock and sort of the deal got changed at the last minute and just said, "nope this is as far as we'll go." So that was kind of depressing at that point. It was well we're happy to have a compromise here but 8'oclock certainly made it more difficult to enter any kind of model where you might sell food. In most states when people think of a brewpub they think of a restaurant with a brewery. A 10 o'clock time frame made that much more doable. So that part we weren't too happy about. But other than that it limited the size of a brewery, you couldn't be bigger than 10,000 barrels which I felt was a pretty reasonable number. All in all I was pretty happy that we actually achieved a compromise. I think really, truly it was said at the hearing quite a bit that we needed this to grow the industry. Without a doubt, it did. I mean the taproom law in '99 it is the best thing to happen in the brewing industry ever in this state, legally, period. Really it allowed a workable business model that breweries could thrive in. It was a little bit of a blend; give us a little bit of full retail abilities but it also made you focus on your wholesales. We developed really good relationships with out local tavern owners who were interested in locally made craft beer yet you also had a little venue to raise some cash and market directly with your customers in the taproom. So in my opinion was very successful and did exactly what it was suppose to do.

AW: And it's fortunate that bill passed not too long after you started the brewery, as that would have been obviously a huge challenge. But what other challenges were you facing when you first opened?

BS: Well we didn't have a lot of money, but we had day jobs. So what was the biggest challenge probably for me, because I was kind of the managing partner of our company. So in order to make this work I cut down on my time, I went to half-time at the state and would go in and work like 6 a.m. in the morning until 10 a.m. and then I would go to work at the brewery and work until about midnight. I think it was year three where I finally-I was the first one to get paid, I got paid $5000 I think for year number three. So for me the big challenge in the first several years was that I was living on half a paycheck from the state and at that point I was a single father and it was very economically challenging to do it. I mean we tried to do everything we could to build the brewery. We tried to do everything ourselves as much as possible, from parts of the construction. We hired contractors where we needed. It was one of things, I mean it was a great experience to learn a lot on all kinds of things because if you didn't know how to do something you found someone who did or you made it happen. It was really rewarding in that respect but it

was very challenging. We weren't this well funded start-up. We borrowed $60,000 from the bank to get started and it's not really that much money in today's dollars. People I've help open up other breweries in the state, especially if you're not doing much of the work yourself your spending $300,000 at least. But that was still a challenge back then, especially the income stream side was a challenge. We only got to sell our beer wholesale, which the margin on beer in the wholesale market is much lower. However, because Montana did for a while allow for self distribution so initially we did that all ourselves, which instead of allowing the wholesaler to take 35% of your revenue in order to sell and deliver your beer we did it directly. We had about initially 10 or 12 accounts we were able to get in Helena. We would, usually me, would go in sell the beer, clean the lines, deliver the kegs, collect the money. So we really focused on that on our wholesale side and on what we could do, which we could sell growlers. Growlers weren't something that were particularly popular in Montana at the time because, you know, because bars never did them. But it was an area where we could sell product direct to a customer and actually make a reasonable amount of money on them. So we really focused on those two things. And it still comes down to even our policy today in the Blackfoot is when you come and fill up a growler, we give you a free glass of beer. That originated from before we could sell beer for you to drink. So the deal was if you came in, I mean we had little glasses if people just wanted to sample beers. But if you came and bought a growler, we gave you a pint-back in those days all we used was pints-for you to enjoy while we cleaned your growler, and filled it and got it all ready. So we focused on our off-premise sales on the restaurant side and it was just barely enough and you can tell from those first three years it was just barely enough to cover our expenses. By not paying ourselves-all the money we made, we continually put back into-continue to buy a couple more tanks here, this there, and really slowly increased the size of our system and capacity.

AW: And the original taproom was next to-in the same building as Miller's Crossing.

BS: Yes that was originally, that metal building part was built in the 60's and it was built to be the loading dock for the Eddy's Bakery, because that building where Miller's was the Eddy's Bakery. That's why that metal garage has four bays they would pull their bread truck there and load them in there and take them out because they delivered bread all around the community from there. And there had been a sign shop in there. Myhre Advertising was what was in that. When they moved out early 1998, we became aware the building being opened and that was when we were putting together our whole business plan and everything else so we ended up leasing that building in May '98 and then starting in the brewery. I think we moved in May 1st. But yeah that was the brewery and the taproom. It was a difficult place to both make and drink beer. It was very hot in the summer.

AW: I've heard stories, unfortunately I never made it in there when you guys were still in there. I heard that it was small but still felt very communal and everyone just enjoyed having that easy way to just open up and just talk to people. And I think that's where, sorry to get philosophical,

but I think that's where the community hub role that taprooms play kind of started was in those smaller environments.

BS: Yes, literally our taproom was less than twice as big as this room. Listeners here can't really hear that but anything more than 40 people, it started to be very busy. Sometimes we would probably have 80 in there.

AW: Wow!

BS: I do have a comment I think is relevant if it's okay to throw one out there.

AW: Go ahead.

BS: I think particularly after the taproom legislation passed it what really help Montana breweries grow, but part of that reason, I think the allure was the, again go back to the political tie of the gambling license to the on premise bar and tavern licenses, really started having an impact because the revenue associated with the gambling side of those businesses became so large that the people that were buying the licenses, they were primarily turning their business models into casinos. And so you were using what should have been licenses for, you know, community tavern kind of bar type of establishments, they were evolving away form that. And there was a large part of the population that didn't want to go hang out in a casino. They wanted to meet their friends and have a beer and they didn't feel like these places were family friendly. And so in a lot of ways I feel like the movement away from the tavern industry in the state to actually meet the needs of the people in order to focus on very lucrative gambling, which I can understand why they would go there but it left people with no alternative of places to really go. And so it was all happening at the same time when the breweries were allowed to sell beer on premise. I really felt it was a huge part of the success was there was, it was not-there wasn't the pub atmosphere anywhere really to go.

AW: Wow that's really interesting! I had never thought of that.

BS: That's why I added that. I think in the historical perspective of stuff it is really important. I don't think that we would have the clientele that really appreciate. I mean brewery taprooms in Montana a lot people really love them. I mean you go to Philipsburg, you go to the taproom. And we identify them so much with local culture identity and I think that really strengthened it because there really weren't that many other good options.

AW: From what sources do you get your ingredients? Are they mainly Montana or are they Northwest focused? Where do they come from?

BS: We are probably in terms of our brewery we are probably the widest sourcing brewery for ingredients. Brad and I from brewing many, many different styles of beer as home brewers are fairly strong willed about trying to be traditional to certain styles of beer. So we tend to use more traditional ingredients for certain beer styles than other people do. So in terms of like making

I.P.A., we actually import British floor malted heirloom Maris Otter-malting barely that's probably the most expensive base malt in the world but it's in my opinion probably the best malt for making English-style ales but really expensive. It's not from Montana, I get the fact that it's got a bigger carbon footprint, it will come from England to get to here. But it's also probably the oldest still currently used variety malting barley in the world. One of the few winter sown varieties, meaning it's planting like winter wheat, it's sown in the fall and then it's allowed to go dormant and then re-germinate in the spring. Really low protein makes wonderful beer. So we do more of that than I think anybody else. So that being said our big flagship beer, Single Malt I.P.A. uses that malt exclusively. We also buy a lot of malt form a company that's called Malt Europe. Which actually has the only malting barley plant in Montana, which is up right next to Black Eagle, outside Great Falls. It's one of the most modern malt plants in the world, it's a fabulous facility, they've got a great product, they're using I think 99% Montana grown barley. They only produce base malt, so again in beer making that's what most of your additions is to ultimately provide the sugars that you need to make alcohol and the body you link to the beer. There's other many different kinds, especially malts that we use to provide different flavors, and colors and aromas to the beer. So the plant in Great Falls does not produce any of those. And again we go back to our roots for those, we primarily source a lot of that from the same family owned malt company in England called Crisp, where they do make all those different varieties of roasted barely and black barely and chocolate malt, and amber malt and they call it cara malt, which is a caramelized malt. So we'll have many different varieties to use, we really like those particular English products. All of our organic products barely-we're the state's first certified organic brewery. All of our beers aren't certified organic, just three of them are. We've had to be really creative about sourcing the barely for those because it's been really difficult over the years to find a reliable of source of quality organic malted barley. Initially we got quite a bit from British Columbia because there was a great maltster there and earlier than that we were actually getting a lot from Wisconsin from a pre-malting company, and now Great Western Malting in Vancouver, WA is where we get a bulk of our organic malt from Germany, some of the specialty malts. To break it down into numbers, probably 40% of all the malt we get comes from Crisp in England for I.P.A. and I would say 40% of the rest of that comes from Great Falls. And then hops, it's even a crazier market. The Yakima Valley produces about 35% of the world's supply of hops and it's about 50 growers who control a third of the world market. The hop business is evolving extremely rapidly due to the popularity of I.P.A.s in America in beer culture. So the growers particularly in the Yakima Valley are developing many different, new high aroma variety of hops that provide very nice aromas to heavily hoped I.P.A. styled beer. So that's changed a lot. Initially we bought all our organic hops from New Zealand because that was the only place you could get them from in the world. And now we've got a great supply of organic hops from Washington thanks to the national organic program kind of changing some of its stuff. I would say three quarters of our hops come from the Yakima Valley and what doesn't come from there comes from the Willamette Valley in Oregon, some from Idaho. We've done a little bit, there is not really a true commercial producer yet in Montana, there's a couple of folks

working on it. We've done some of theirs. And the rest come from a variety of countries. We back up to being sort of traditional brewers. So when we're making specialty types of European lager or German lager we'll actually bring in specific variety of German elbow aroma hops to use in our pilsner, our bock and things like that. So a little bit from all over the place. We do vary yeast strains quite a bit, too. Luckily there's quite a bit a laboratories in this country that bank traditional strains of brewing yeast from around the world that were used to develop beer styles in many countries and they have lots and lots of them cataloged and banked in a cryostorage and you can order any of it. We have a deal with one lab in particular, Y-East Labs in Hood River, OR. They are-at least were started and owned for a long time by Full Sail Brewing. I think maybe they've split the ownership now, it was from beer people that developed the lab. We use quite a bit different strains of yeast, but we get them all from them.

AW: And what about the spent product you use? I know goes back to farmers sometimes and ranchers for feed for their stock.

BS: Yup, all of it does. We have had one farmer who has been with us since day one. Nells Hyram is his name, lives out in the north valley and has cows and pigs. I would say we are now, what did we end up passing? year 17 here little while ago. I bet you he hasn't missed 4-5 brew days in the past 17 years, and we brew 5 days a week. He's been phenomenal in that respect. Several years ago we added a second, because it's a lot of grain, that's typically 2 ½ - 3 tons of a week barely, we're going through. So 5-6 years ago, one day a week we have another farmer come from the Boulder Valley, Laurie Frankie. So she takes one day a week and Nells gets the other days. So all of our grain goes back to them.

AW: Have your brewing practices evolved over the years, would you say there's anything that makes Blackfoot unique, I know you mentioned organic.

BS: Most definitely they've evolved over the years. Probably for the first 10 years, I was the head brewer and made most of the beer with help from my two partners. I'm getting old, brewing is a young person's job, it's a lot of hard work. So we have had a new head brewer now for the last 5 years, and someone in between there. But we have definitely evolved in that time frame. I was always a little bit more believing that, ya know you hear a lot of brewers say that making beer is a mix or blend of art and science and I think it's very true. I was always probably a little more focused on the art. And Tim, our current head brewer and now one of the newer partners definitely has a better scientific background. He worked at Big Sky Brewing for 6 and a half years before joining us. Does a fabulous job with-not that I wouldn't have gotten to some of those things at some point, but we actually have some laboratory ability now, we can actually analyze and look at our yeast cells and determine how viable they are and make sure they're clean and pure and no bacteria. And a lot of things like that that we do that we didn't used to. And that being said, we still haven't made that many changes. We probably make the simplest beer in the state in terms of we still don't filter. I think we're probably the largest non-filtering brewery in the state. We allow our beer to condition in a secondary tank after we ferment it so

we move it to another vessel in the cold room and we just let it sit. Ultimately the yeast, after it had the opportunity once it's finished its fermentation and you can keep it cold, it flocculates so it settles out of the solution into bottle of the tank then you can pull the clear beer off that. So it's a natural way to dye the beer without using any diatomaceous earth bleach filter pads and centrifuging is very popular these days. You put it in a centrifuge and you spin the particles out. So if you notice, I don't know how much of our beer you've had it before, it's not perfectly what we could call bright where it's crystal clear with the color because you haven't filtered it. The thing I think that's really important about that is, I don't particularly like cloudy beer more than anyone else does, but the process of micro filtering beer really strips a lot of the flavor. So if you know you're going to filter your beer you have to start brewing different ahead of time, or do some things where you try use what would never would have been traditional brewing practices, where you have to try to add some flavors back in after you've filter because basically you're taking any particle bigger than a micron or two and you're stripping it out. You really notice it with the hop flavors particularly if you filter beer, it's really hard to get some of that hop bouquet and the citrusy flavors. So we're still not-filtering and we really don't use any other chemicals in our beer. There's things some people do to stabilize flavors and things like that, we're just truly water, malt, hops, and yeast and occasionally the wild kind of fun stuff that our brewers like to do in terms of spices and things like that. So we're still very simple in our beer making approach.

AW: What do you see as the brewery's greatest accomplishments to date?

BS: Boy that's a very tough one. As in ours, or breweries in the state?

AW: Yours.

BS: Okay, you know, we're still here [laughs]. Probably our involvement in-the interaction with the community. That was always a big thing for us in that we felt like every community should have a good brewery and that a brewery, ideally with a taproom, would be in place for people to meet and people to talk and not watch t.v. or play the machine. It's a really great atmosphere for that. That's an accomplishment as well, in terms of providing a venue for that. But really, we've been able to interact in our community, give a lot back to it, which for the financial level and for the size of business that we are, we've done a lot. I know we donate more in this community than giant retailers here do and our revenues are microscopic in comparison to what they do. I think that's the thing I'm probably the proudest about but I'm really proud of our beer, and I don't make it anymore! I really think that our crew, we've got four people full-time that make beer and they do an awesome job and so I'm super proud about that.

AW: You've taken home some awards for your beers.

BS: We have, we don't enter a lot of competitions. We've never entered the giant one, which is the Great American Beer Fest, that's the largest one in the world. We've entered the second largest one in the country which is actually in Idaho Falls of all places. It's called the North American Beer Awards, and it's the second largest professionally judged competition and it's

because it's not far away from here we've gone 7 or 8 times over our history because it's four hours away and they have several days of judging and a big brewfest at the end. We've won quite a few there over the years. At then different local festivals sometimes people judge them and sometimes they don't. The different with the Idaho Falls and the Great American Beer Fest the judges actually, for the most part, are very well trained. Even then, it's always great to win awards. I don't think us as brewers feel it's as important in our company as maybe other people do because you really know, like when we make a really great beer, we know. I mean it's like, wow. And when I have somebody else's beer? If that's a really great beer I'll be like, "this is awesome!" But sometimes the judging process is so…I've done it a few times, it's really difficult. You have to start to think about the impact if you were to sit here and judge beer here today. Even If you were to do one style in a fairly small judging, you might have to try 50 samples of 50 different I.P.A.s right now. It's really difficult. It's hard on the palate. So I don't put as much stock in it-it's always nice, it always feels good when somebody recognized your product. At the same time, I feel [inaudible] we really know when we make good beer and that's probably more rewarding anyway.

AW: Perfect, I agree. I always appreciate your beer.

BS: Thank you.

AW: Side note, the gose? Oh my gosh. That might be my favorite beer from you guys.

BS: Oh wow. I'm glad that you like it. That' Eric, who's one of our brewers, his sort of his passion child, he really liked that style of beer, very difficult beer to brew. It involves kettle souring which I had wanted to do it for years and Tim and I had talked about doing it where you're actually, instead of doing more of the Belgian souring process where you allow it to be spontaneously inoculated with bacteria and you give it months or years in barrels to sit there, there is naturally lactobacillus on the malt already so you mash it and just let it run off warm. You let it sit, in this case over a weekend so then bacteria gets a chance to start growing before you've ever add the yeast and then you boil it. So it's a different process, one that we've never attempted before and Eric did a fabulous job, he did his research and this was his project, he's done a wonderful job. We're super proud of his, I'll tell him anyway.

AW: Thanks! How has the demographics of the customers in the taproom evolve over the years?

BS: That's a little tough one, I wanna say partially in our taproom, the average age has probably increased a little. Part of that is I think is those of us that started the business we've known a lot of these people and our age is going up every year too! I think that part of that is also I think back in the day I felt like you'd find maybe older people wouldn't want to switch to a new type of beer. I always thought when I was younger and making beer it was harder to convince a couple a generation two or older, they're used to drinking Budweiser or something. So I feel like maybe some of those people have tended to come around more with the availability of craft beer. I feel like anybody-if you tell me you don't like beer I'd say you haven't tried enough yet,

enough different kinds. I think some of those folks are coming in. The other side of it I think, probably even larger is the appreciation of craft beer from the female customers. It used to be a stereotype probably 20 years ago that many women weren't beer drinkers. That's so far from the truth today, that it has definitely changed greatly. On the age, I don't know, we see a fair amount of younger people but I would say our sweet spot for demographics really doesn't hit until maybe people in their late 20s, post 25. That group in the first half of their 20's are doing other things usually.

AW: That's when it hit me, later 20s. From your perspective, how do you think the brewing industry in the state have evolved over the years?

BS: It's definitely grown, greatly. I think it's evolved in a couple of different ways, one of which I like more than others. The growth and…I don't want to use the word "proliferation" because sometime people think it sounds negative. There is a lot of taproom focus and local breweries in the state now, I love that. I love the fact that you have folks like Triple Dog in Havre and Beaverhead Brewing in Dillon. And you see these small communities that didn't have maybe that much going for it in the way of food and beverage diversity. It's one thing I think Montana suffers from greatly anyways, especially in dining side. So to see small towns get kind of their own hometown taproom, folks brewing, I absolutely love it. I think it's a really great thing for communities. So that's been great. The other side, I see some folks-and this is a difference of philosophy-that clearly have financial business success in mind and want to become ever large. And there is not too many brewers, I have to say this and people will probably dislike me for it, there's not too many brewers I've seen and had their beer that the larger they've gotten, the better their beer has gotten. I think there's very commonly a correlation there. There's some, like I'm a big fan of Sierra Nevada. They get the award in my opinion, I know they're not from Montana but for largest craft brewer who I feel like their beer has stayed just as good. Certainly hasn't gone downhill at all. But part of that I think is just the larger scale that you make it and the way you package it to try to survive in non-refrigerated environments for months doesn't really do it for me. So I think there's change we've had-it's great to see the local breweries, but also it has changed that you're seeing quite a few now Montana brewers who think that large volumes and packaging is the way to go. It's just not the way we chose to go.

AW: Okay, so we've pretty much already addressed the role, but if there's anything you want to add. What do you think the role taproom or a brewery in general plays in a community?

BS: The earlier part I talked about I think is really true, it gives people a comfortable meeting place. One of things one of our customers said about us a long time ago that I feel is really true in our sense, and I think in a lot of others is it's all about the beer and the people. We provide the beer and the atmosphere and a facility for you to come and kind of get away from everything else and really connect with people. That's why we have community seating which sometimes forces you sit down with people you don't know. It makes for some really interesting conversations and different things. So I think that it plays a role in that way again because there's not that many

other opportunities to do it. There's other things to keep you busy. The great thing about the taproom is there is no pressure to buy any food, so there's nothing else to do, unless you're going to read. We see a lot of that, people reading or people come to paly cribbage, but most of the people come visit. So I think that's great. Honestly why do we go out places? Most people go out to socialize so it's really a great venue for that. I think it also plays a role in the community…I think when it really comes down to it people like to be proud of local, unique cultural parts in their community. There's something about having-that's why I say it's a great thing for a lot of the small towns-about being proud of your hometown brewery, "We have one!" It's a little bit of cultural identity for your town. "We're somebody, we're big enough."

AW: It provides that sense of place.

BS: Yes

AW: Perfect. You did mention some of this earlier, but once again if you have anything to add. Do you have any concerns for the direction you see the brewing industry heading in the state?

BS: You know I guess I personally have some concerns. Money certainly plays a bigger role than I think that it used to be. We've seen that in some of the divisions of-we've had our struggle with the tavern owners, and we've had our struggles in the last couple years where tavern owners have basically sort of taken control of the Brewers Association and we've have some very contentious internal policy struggles because there's people with lots of money that would like to change things to benefit their business model, and that's hard. I think we've had a lot of discussion about not pulling up the ladder from those who come behind us. There's been a big push from some people in the tavern industry side of stuff that have become brewers per say, in the legal sense, who want to push us into the quota system. Where ultimately there will be fewer brewers that will be open and it's that whole kind of guaranteed business model of producing competition and there's money the pushes that. I don't like to see it. We've been success specifically because of the taproom legislation was-the one thing you didn't have to have was hundreds of thousands of dollars to buy a license, because we never would have opened if that were the case. If we push the brewers into participate in the quota system along with bars and gambling, there's not going to be any little breweries that open. On top of today I helped friends open a brewer in Missoula, they spent $350,000 to open a smaller than us brewery. If you throw in a small on premise alcohol license on top of that you're at $650,000. That's not money most of us have. So that's the thing that I don't like about the direction, I think money plays a bigger role and I money has tried to influence the direction of the industry. Money has tried to create the opportunity for chamberies, per say, where you have one production facility but multiple breweries, like brewery own bars-which is clearly against the whole part of the three-tier system which when people try to push that kind of model, I'm not really big on it. But I'm sure you might interview one of those people and they might try to tell you that it's all about growth and economy and those things.

AW: Alright that's pretty much all I have. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

BS: Let me think about it a little bit. Well at least in terms of sort of the history and the regulatory environment if you want to say, we've had quite a few other accomplishments since getting the taproom legislation passed and I think ultimately we'll have some more. It will take some time. Specifically this wasn't all that easy. Let's just go back to defending the taproom legislation. We kind of had three serious challenges to it. Unfortunately the first two were started by the Department of Revenue at the insistence of some of their administrators who had some very close ties to the Tavern Association. The first bout of that came in I think 2002 where they came out with a rule-or a proposed, I noticed a proposed rulemaking, I had left the department by this time, that said a brewery can't have a patio, a deck, serve any food, have music, and must be physically closed with the customers out the door by 8 o'clock. Do you do much administrative rule making work in your agencies?

AW: Not really, no.

BS: So administrative rules are regulations that are created by state agencies that carry the weight of law, but they're not enacted by the legislature. The legislature grants rule making authority to different agencies to deal with specific parts of legislation and sometime they pass a bill, but they weren't super clear on all the details because sometimes you have to figure all those things out. So they give agencies discretion to make regulations that carry the weight of law but there's a specific process that you have to follow to get there. And so the department came out just came out of the middle of nowhere with these really onerous rules and the paperwork had to be a hearing and all this stuff. They were saying the justification was to clarify legislation. So this is when I had to look into some of the earlier history and we had to go back and at this point I was president of the state's brewers association and we had to go back and try to get all the legislative testimony and to prove to the department that indeed there was no legislative history that said we couldn't have music or any of these things. And it was a really, at this point life-threatening fight to some of these very young taprooms. It had been just three years, so a lot had changed. It was very emotionally difficult, very trying, but we ultimately basically won on every point and compromised on one. That was really important because if they had prevailed in that, we would have gone back to realistically, if you had to lock your door and 8 o'clock and nobody could be there, you're serving that last beer at 7:15, you can't have any music, you can't have any food, you can't have a deck or patio. They really wanted to make it retroactively not a place a customer would enjoy. No doubt in my mind this was all pushed from the tavern industry with some favorable connections in the department at that time. The person who actually was a member of management in the department who led the charge against, us, I'm not going to name any names, but has left the department and is now the executive director and lobbyist for the Montana Gaming Industry Association, somebody who was in the industry, connections all along. So that was a huge thing, it wasn't just that we got the law passed and everything was good. We had another one after that. I want to say now we're all the way forward to maybe 2009 and the department claimed it had to come out with another rule to determine when we closed,

because the bars and taverns post breweries never really liked it that the law said we can serve until eight. They said "the law for bars says we close at 2, therefor you guys close at 8." And I'm like, "no, the law says very clearly we may serve till 8." So the department came out with a proposed rule saying "you close at 8". So we started all over again and ultimately-and they said it was because they had some complains and law enforcement had some concerns. And Brad and I kind of led the charge out of Helena of course we both used to work for the department. Social media was phenomenal, even actually regular media we got a lot of great press on it, the department got a lot of pressure. So the department agreed to enter into what we call negotiated rule making process. So they brought in members of law enforcement and members of the brewers and we sat down and had a negotiation. Much better way to do this. And it was funny because the law enforcement people were like, "we don't have any concerns about what time you close, in fact we kind of don't have to deal with any issues like that until like at least 10 o'clock at night." In fact they suggest 10 o'clock, because they were like that's when our noise ordinances kick in usually. So anyway we ended up agreeing on all parties to go with 9 p.m. So it's a reasonable standpoint that if you're served a beer at 5 to 8, the last thing you want to do-and that's what that rule would have been-if came and ordered a beer at 5 to 8 you'd have to chug it, you'd have 4 minutes to drink this pint of beer. And that wasn't promoting good behavior. And so we ultimately got that. So that sort of settled at least the fighting in keeping that part of the taproom legislation kind of secured. And then maybe finally I saved last piece of at least successful beer history there. It was a big deal. I want to say in the 2009 session? 2011 session.

AW: Starting to run together?

BS: Yes. We got an increase in the beer alcohol percentage passed. Because prior to that Montana allowed 7% alcohol by weight, which is 8 ¾ by volume. But there's a lot of traditional, particularly European beer styles that we as brewers here couldn't make because we would go over the limit. So even if you wanted to make-like right now we're brewing a Belgian Quadruple, which is really big. You couldn't do barely wines and imperial stouts and there's a whole bunch of fun beers that you couldn't legally make, or at least couldn't legally make right. And it started to become a problem, we didn't have any brewers get busted, but the owner of Toppers Market here in Helena, which he's been a fabulous support of artisan beer and wine forever, he had a bunch of inventory confiscated by the department that was over 7%. So anyway we worked with a legislator out of Great Falls, Deb Cotell. She was great, she's phenomenal to work with. We were ultimately able to get that bill passed, which still surprised me to this day that we were-we had to change, I mean the Department of Revenue didn't want just everybody making high alcohol beer because at a that point the director was very much concerned with the abuse to alcohol marketing and he didn't like the big cans of malt liquor and things. So really I got to spend a lot of time on that bill and write the definition of what constituted what could be basically a beer that could go over 14%. If you look at that code we had to get creative and find a way to say this is what a good high alcohol beer would look like. We came up with a definition

to measure its malt base. That was a great thing for brewers and consumers both and even for retailers and wholesalers because there were people unknowingly bringing in beer that violated the law and all of us brewers wanted to make stuff that was over and it's not like the customers didn't want any more stuff. So it was in my opinion that was another nice thing about beer-freedom and success since all of this started. So next time you drink a big beer think of Deb Cotell in Great Falls.

AW: Just wanted to thank you for sitting down. What you have said today will help me go forward and has really helped the direct the future of my project. I really thank you very much.

Smith: You're very welcome. It was an interesting process for me to go through.